

Do's and Don'ts of Exercising With Your Dog

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Dogs can be a great inspiration as well as a companion and protector for those who enjoy running. Too often, dogs willing to do almost anything to please their owners and their inability to directly communicate their aches and pains with their owners, end up getting hurt sometimes even to the point of dying. Just like with people, dogs need to begin exercising slowly. Before starting an exercise program with your dog, consider its breed, age, and physical condition. Because dogs come in so many sizes and have unique problems common to their breed (small nostrils, long hair, short legs), there's no rule for how much exercise is too much. It's best to start gradually and during the cooler parts of the day.

One of the more common problems seen with dogs that exercise with their owners is blisters on their paws. Over time however, a dog will build up calluses on its feet, which will allow the dog to run longer distances and time. Overheating is a serious problem and one which is very likely to occur here in the San Antonio unless the owner is very careful and is sure the animal is acclimated to the heat and does not overdo its workout. During exercising, dogs need even more water than humans do because they do not sweat and their panting is not as efficient in cooling them down as sweating is in humans. Also a dog's age is very important in the determining the distance it should run. Although puppies are full of energy and may love running, they shouldn't go on long runs because their bones are not fully developed and the stress of running may harm their growth plates resulting in shorter or deformed limbs. Larger breeds are slower to mature than smaller breeds, so therefore it may be appropriate to run with a smaller terrier breed before it would be with a large dog such as a Labrador. Some common sense Do's and Don'ts of exercising with a dog include:

- Don't run with toy breeds or short nosed dogs such as bulldogs.
- Don't run a dog on hot pavement. If the surface is too hot to put your hand on, it's too hot for the dog to run on.
- Don't force the dog to exercise. Cut the workout short if the dog looks tired or stressed.
- Don't take puppies on long runs because of the potential to damage their bones and joints. Dogs of about 20 pounds or less can go running at 8-10 months, while large breeds need to wait until at least 18 months.
- Don't exercise overweight dogs, dogs suspected of having heartworms, or any other medical condition without discussing your pet's health with a veterinarian first.
- Do build the dog's endurance gradually.
- Do watch for signs of overheating: redness on the insides of the ears, excessive panting, weakness, wobbling or fainting. **Overheating can be fatal.** If you suspect overheating, immediately immerse the dog in cool (not

icy) water or spray it with a hose. Seek veterinary care immediately. Use ice packs or wet towels to keep the dog cool in transit.

- Do consider carrying water for your dog depending on the length of the run.

For more information on exercising your dog, contact the Fort Sam Houston Veterinary Treatment Facility (295-4260).